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**1961/03/16**

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(1016/61).



-5 APR 1961

1. Mr. Coughlin R/SB 4/4  
(not read - doc. in  
British Embassy  
Havana - in any way)

March 16, 1961

Dear Robin *AK 1015/29*

2. Enter com, p

In a number of recent telegrams we have attempted to assess the balance of forces within Cuba and the Revolutionary regime's prospects for survival. It is some time however since we last gave you a fuller account of counter-revolutionary activities and alarms and excursions, and the following resume may therefore be of interest. I would again emphasize that the extreme difficulties of obtaining reliable information in this country of exaggeration, rumour and official deception, but there is an immense amount of detail in the press and in the recent speeches of the Revolutionary leaders who are pre-occupied with the theme of counter-revolution. Many of the incidents reported in the press we have been able to confirm by observation. Moreover, we have a number of reports from recent travellers to other parts of the island (some members of the Embassy), which even if they are often negative, are nevertheless of value.

A. Active Armed Opposition

The principal centre has been Las Villas Province in the area of the Escambray mountains. As reported in our telegram No. 212 of March 14 the communique published that day sought to give the impression that all but a few scattered groups or individuals had been killed or captured. Only once previously, on October 8 last year, had a similar communique been issued on the Escambray operations, when it was announced that 102 people had been captured. (Our telegram No. 525 of October 10, 1960). That communique issued six months ago had also sought to give the impression that the operation had been more or less eliminated. On that occasion it was given out that the prisoners were mostly ex-members of Batista's army. The figures quoted in the latest communique were 381 prisoners and 39 killed out of a total of about 500. Lists of the names of the dead and of the prisoners were given. The communique had a long political preamble which stated that ever since the triumph of the Revolution the reactionary elements had sought to return to power with the foreign assistance and that the C.I.A., the U.S. Embassy and the reactionary monopolies had allied themselves with these elements, which included the politicians, the Army and the exploiting economic interests of the former regime, to create terrorism, sabotage and armed bands opposed to the Revolution. But the statement went on to state that the explanation of the opposition in the mountains of Las Villas was to be found in the defection from the Revolution of the organisation known as the "Second Front of Escambray" which had operated in the same area before January 1959 and from which a considerable number of ex-Batistianos had been transferred with the Rebel Army to the Government forces after the Revolution. The communique was highly critical of the illegitimate "Second Front of Escambray" organisation which was alleged to have been in opposition to Batista and spent most of its time terrorising the peasants rather than fighting the enemy. The organisation was, as you will recall, disbanded in February 1960 (our Embassy letter 1201/60 of March 9, 1960). When the first stories of armed resistance in Las Villas came to our notice as long ago as August last year it was reported that some of those in the hills were from "The Second Front of Escambray", and in the following months this was definitely established (c.f. Section II(b) of my letter 12016/60 of September 29, 1960). We now know that the leader of the group was in the Escambray at that time. Films were shown on television the day before yesterday showing the cave where he had his headquarters. However, he and about twenty companions left the area and arrived in Miami on January 24. The communique also refers to the renegade ex-American William Morgan, Major in the Revolutionary Army, who was accused of aiding the

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rebels in the Escambray, was tried before a Revolutionary Tribunal and executed on March 12. Morgan was also formerly with the "Second Front".

It is very difficult to know just how many people were fighting in the Escambray mountains. It seems to be clear however that at least some were at large for almost six months, that the number varied considerably during that period, and that the number increased about the beginning of this year. It also seems that they were not re-inforced from outside Cuba, and that a large proportion were local people from Las Villas Province. Neither the Armed Forces Communiqué nor Castro on March 4 suggested that any of those captured had come in from the U.S. or elsewhere. What is more important is to know how many are still there. The official line is that only a few remain and are being mopped up. This was also the impression obtained by the Daily Express Correspondent Thursby when he succeeded in visiting the area on February 23, but he did not go much beyond Trinidad and was very much in the hands of the authorities. Miss Irons of the Sunday Times, accompanied by Robert Starkie, the would-be correspondent of the Toronto Telegram, went there on March 2 and were able to get further afield. As I have reported in other contexts, we do not regard Starkie as very reliable, but we do not discredit their joint story that when they were there the main part of the resistance had been suppressed. Starkie admitted that it was very difficult to know how many people had been involved, and the figures would depend upon whether or not one counted the considerable number of local farmers and peasants who had assisted the rebels. Starkie claimed to have seen some of these people who were in a terrible state of destitution and who were claiming that they had been forced to collaborate. Many of them had been taken prisoner or at least held by the Government forces and some had been transferred to State farms and co-operatives in other parts of the province. The press has made much of the campaign of education and indoctrination which has been carried out by the militia amongst the local peasants. Other informants, including British staff of the Cable & Wireless Station at Cienfuegos, a Cuban who escaped and has taken asylum in the Brazilian Embassy, are also agreed that the main resistance has been crushed. On the other hand, it is generally agreed that it has not been completely put down. The official version allows about eighty people still in the hills. The manager of Cable & Wireless from Cienfuegos who came up to Havana today thinks there are probably rather more, and that there is still a very great amount of tension in the area amongst Government officials. But according to him it is invasion or raids from outside which they fear most. The militia in the area which number between 40 and 60,000 have not been sent home. And I must add that the French Military Attaché, who has been visiting Cuba from his headquarters in the French Antilles and who has travelled in Las Villas province, puts the number of those still at large as high as 2000.

The official communiqué also lists large quantities of arms which have been captured from supply drops. I attended the opening ceremony of the exhibition of captured equipment referred to in paragraph 2 of our telegram No. 186, when Dr. Olivarez Sanchez, the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, addressed such members of the Diplomatic Corps as chose to attend, and asked that they report to their Governments on those 'irrefutable proofs' of U.S. aggression against Cuba. Most of the arms on show are brand new and in their original packing cases which would be consistent with the story that they were captured before they ever reached the hands of the counter-revolutionaries. Olivarez said in conversation that the arms in the exhibition had been taken over a fairly long period of operations. It may even be that it includes some weapons captured as long ago as last year. The communiqué of October 8, 1960 also referred to the capture of arms dropped by parachute. The lists in the latest communiqué however do not specifically mention drops before January 6 this year.

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As regards open armed resistance in other parts of Cuba, we have no firm information. In his speech of March 4, Castro stated that groups of men had been landed in various parts of the coast, but that all had been picked up. This connects with rumours which reached us of landings last month on the north coast of Oriente and in Pinar del Rio. There was also a story that a small group, consisting at least in part of deserters from the police and army in the Guantanamo area, had been operating in the Sierra Maestra.

#### Leaflet raids.

There have been a number of incursions by aircraft over Havana and other cities, dropping leaflets calling on students to strike, and over other parts of the country dropping arms and supplies. The same aircraft have probably been used for both purposes on some occasions. According to the Government version the leaflets are immediately burned by the populace and the arms and supplies invariably fall into the hands of loyal forces. Such leaflets as we have seen are pretty poor stuff. There is a map in the exhibition mentioned above giving the places where aircraft have allegedly infringed Cuban sovereignty on over 20 occasions since President Kennedy's inauguration.

#### Sabotage and other incidents.

Acts of sabotage have increased in recent weeks and have spread to provincial towns as well as Havana. In the capital itself, though scarcely a night passes without at least one explosion, it is not quite so noisy as in November and December last. It is our impression, however, that while the number of bombs may have decreased, they are now doing more damage than before, and that this is the intention of those who place them. Several districts of Havana were without electricity for three nights in succession last week following damage to cables and transformers, a bomb damaged the P.S.P. office in Vedado on March 7, and at the Belot (formerly Esso) refinery one petrol tank lorry was blown up and five others destroyed by fire on March 6. This latter incident might well have done serious damage had not the fire brigade been on the scene very quickly, together with President Dorticos, Fidel Castro and other notables. Industrial sabotage is on the increase - so far this month we have had a fire at a paper factory in Havana, another at La Conchita preserves factory in Pinar del Rio province and the destruction of a number of vehicles at the Coca-Cola factory near Havana, the burning of a bus on the road near Bacuranao, a fire in the "El Encanto" department store in Santiago de Cuba and the placing of a bomb in the tail of a Constellation aircraft belonging to Cubana (this was discovered before the aircraft took off). A bagasse mill in Cienfuegos has been burnt out. Two nights ago there was a serious fire in one of the storehouses of the "Ten Cents" department store in Havana which has been ascribed to sabotage. Other incidents include the placing of bombs in or under private cars - most of the cars directly involved have belonged to members of the army or militia, but a bomb in the basement garage of the Havana Libre Hotel last week damaged other cars as well. Shooting incidents have also become more frequent, the most notable perhaps being the shooting dead of the head of G-2 in Las Villas province at the end of February. Early in March there was an incident in the Miramar district which was thought to have been an attempt on Che Guevara's life, but we can confirm no more than the fact that one Army captain was wounded. Several militiamen have been shot dead or wounded in other incidents. At the commemoration of the "La Coubre" disaster on March 4, a car drove up to the crowd waiting to hear Fidel Castro speak and from it shots were fired which wounded several people, though no attempt was made to fire at the people on the platform. As you will have seen from the News Agency reports, on March 13 a motor vessel approached the harbour entrance at Santiago de Cuba and opened fire at the oil storage tanks of the former Texaco refinery with machine-guns and cannon, causing some damage, before retiring seaward - allegedly to take shelter in the Guantanamo naval base.

/The Cuban

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The Cuban Government's response to the resurgence of sabotage and other counter-revolutionary acts has been to resume summary trial and executions of those captured. Apart from former Revolutionary bosses now condemned as "leaders of the counter-revolutionary forces" such as Clodomir Miranda and William Morgan, for whom the death penalty could not have been a surprise, two persons were shot on March 7 for the bus-burning incident referred to in the preceding paragraph and two others on the same day for placing bombs in electrical installations in Havana. A group of persons found manufacturing bombs and possession various weapons in December last were sentenced to between 15 and 30 years imprisonment, as they had been arrested before the new Law against Sabotage and Terrorism came into effect in January.

I am copying this letter to Miss Brown in Washington, Heath in Mexico City, Royce in Caracas, and to the Commander, Caribbean Area.

*Yours sincerely,*

*I. J. M. Sutherland*

(I. J. M. Sutherland).

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